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THE INFLUENCE OF EARLY MUSICAL STYLES IN
BRAHMS'S MOTETS OPUS 29, OPUS 74 AND OPUS 110

BY

EVELYN M. PFEIFER

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a study of the influences of Brahms's studies of earlier musical styles (ie. Renaissance and Baroque) on his motets, specifically Opus 29, Opus 74 and Opus 110. Opus 74, regarded as the pinnacle of his a cappella motets, receives the primary focus and Opus 29 and Opus 110 further illustrate this early music influence.

The paper begins with biographical information that focuses on the various influences in Brahms's life which encouraged him to study earlier traditions. This is followed by a general description of his choral works and then a discussion of the Opus 29 and Opus 110 motets. The remainder of the paper is an analysis of the two motets comprising Opus 74, emphasis being placed on the presence of earlier musical styles, as well as on Brahms's gradual integration of these elements into a contemporary, individual style.

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¹All musical examples are taken from:

Johannes Brahms, Geistliche Chormusik (Carus-Verlag 40.179, 1982.)

*Johannes Brahms, Messe ed. Otto Biba (Vienna: Doblinger 45301, 1984.)

INTRODUCTION

The *a cappella* motets of Johannes Brahms are among his greatest achievements in the realm of choral music. Spanning a thirty-year period, these works reflect the development of Brahms's style within the choral genre. He was a progressive, pioneering individual, but one who never ceased to follow his musical roots through continual research and study of early music. Among the early techniques that can be found in Brahms's *a cappella* choral music are canon, counterpoint, church modes, hemiolas, and antiphonal double choirs.

The essay will begin with a brief biographical sketch and will be followed by a general overview of Brahms's choral music. The *a cappella* motets of Opus 29, Opus 110, and Opus 74 will be discussed in terms of the presence of early musical styles and techniques within each motet, and the development of his own style.

BIOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND

As a young child, Brahms was fascinated with the musical world of the Hamburg theatre, where his father played the double bass, and at the age of seven he demanded piano lessons. Through the instruction of his first piano teachers, Brahms developed an interest in studying music of the past. His teachers insisted that he know and respect past musical traditions, and encouraged him in the study of composers such as Palestrina, Schütz and Bach:

His interest in old music and in historical questions of musical theory was rooted in his childhood, when he went on voyages of exploration to the Hamburg city library to

copy from and study its ample supply of old music manuscripts and theoretical works.¹

Robert and Clara Schumann were also instrumental in encouraging Brahms in his pursuit of earlier styles, being quite intrigued by the techniques themselves. After Robert's collapse and death, Brahms was given unlimited access to his library, which was quite extensive in terms of early manuscripts and writings.

Brahms not only copied and studied manuscripts and theoretical works, he also collected many of them for his own library. Included in his collection were complete editions of Bach, Handel, Schütz, Chopin, Schumann and Mendelssohn, first editions of some works by J.S. Bach, C.P.E. Bach, D. Scarlatti and Gluck, as well as works by Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven, Schubert, Dvorak, Liszt, Wagner, and Bruckner.²

Brahms mastered the compositional techniques employed by early composers. He became particularly interested in canonic writing, which prompted him, in 1856, to begin writing a mass in strict canonic style. The work was never completed; however, those sections which do exist reflect elements of Palestrina's polyphonic *a cappella* style.³ The form of the mass was more important than

¹Stanley Sadie, ed. The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians (London: MacMillan Publishers Limited, 1980), s.v. "Brahms," by Heinz Becker.

²Karl Geiringer, Brahms: His Life and Work, 3rd ed. (New York: Da Capo Press, 1982), 373 - 374.

³The surviving movements of the mass, Sanctus, Benedictus, Agnus Dei and an unrelated fugal Kyrie with organ accompaniment (which may have been compiled by Brahms' friend Julius Otto Grimm) was published by Otto Biba in 1984 (Vienna: Doblinger 45301). Entitled Messe by Biba, the work has also been referred to as Missa Canonica.

the text, and

in attempting a mass he was more attracted by the archaic associations of the form, and the opportunity for choral canonic working on a large canvas, than by the text of the traditional Catholic liturgy.⁴

In addition to past musical styles, Brahms's choral music also shows the influence of German folk tunes. Throughout his life, he collected and arranged a vast number of folksongs, combining them under such titles as 10 Volkslieder, 28 Deutsche Volkslieder, and 32 Neue Volkslieder.

Brahms was in the employ of the Prince of Lippe-Detmold from September to December of 1857, 1858 and 1859. His duties included teaching piano, arranging court concerts, and conducting the court choral society. His knowledge of choral music was strengthened by his association with this choral society:

What a small amount of practical knowledge I have! The choir rehearsals have shown me many weak spots; they won't be a waste of time for me. My stuff is written far too impractically. I have studied a lot of things with them, and fortunately from the outset with sufficient assurance.⁵

Most of 1859 to 1862 was spent in Hamburg, where Brahms founded and conducted a women's chorus. He continued to expand his choral experience and wrote many new pieces for this ensemble.

In 1862, Brahms moved to Vienna, and the next year he was invited to conduct the Vienna *Singakademie*, a well-known choral

⁴Malcolm MacDonald, Brahms (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1990), 91-92.

⁵Geiringer, Brahms, 350.

This is an excerpt from a letter to Joseph Joachim dated December 5, 1857.

society. As director, he promoted the music of such early composers as Eccard, Gabrieli, Schütz, and Bach, and programmed more recent compositions by Beethoven and Schubert as well as some of his own works. Brahms had many administrative demands as the director of this group, which he found detracted from the time he needed for composing, and he resigned from the position after only one year.⁶

In 1872, Brahms accepted the position of musical director of the Vienna *Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde*. He implemented positive changes to the orchestra and chorus, demanded intensive study from the musicians, and was uncompromising in his insistence upon the highest possible standards.⁷ Brahms programmed the music of early seventeenth-century composers for most of the eighteen concerts given between 1872 and 1875.⁸

He remained convinced... that early choral music deserved to be performed carefully and well, and that it would eventually be sung and heard with the same kind of understanding and appreciation accorded to his own compositions.⁹

After three years as director of the *Gesellschaft*, Brahms resigned in order to devote more time to composing.

Brahms did not hold another directing position, but he did

⁶MacDonald, Brahms, 129 - 130.

⁷Maria Komorn, "Brahms, Choral Conductor," Musical Quarterly 19/2 (April 1933): 154.

⁸Geiringer, Brahms, 111 - 112.

⁹Virginia Hancock, "Brahms' Performances," Nineteenth-Century Music 8/2 (Fall 1984): 141.

continue to write and publish choral music. He and his music were well received by scholarly institutions as well as the general listening public. At his funeral in 1897, the streets were filled with those who came to mourn the loss of a great musical master.

GENERAL SURVEY OF BRAHMS'S CHORAL WORKS

Writing a *cappella* choral music was not a primary focus of composers during the nineteenth century. Instead, there was a heightened interest in instrumental resources, and the choral sound of earlier eras was supplanted by the more powerful sound of voices with instruments:

The chorus is less suitable for typically Romantic sentiments than the symphony orchestra, and indeed, many nineteenth-century composers treated the chorus primarily as a division of the orchestra, to supply picturesque touches and supplementary colors.¹⁰

However, the style of Brahms's choral compositions written during his years in Detmold and Hamburg (1857 - 1862) strongly reflect his familiarity with Renaissance and early Baroque choral styles. Marienlieder (Opus 22), Drei Geistliche Chöre (Opus 37), and Three Partsongs (Opus 42) are examples of his early *a cappella*, polyphonic style. The Opus 29 motets, Es ist das Heil and Schaffe, in mir Gott, and the second motet of Opus 74, O Heiland, reiss also fit into the above time period and style characteristics. Brahms did also write pieces with orchestral accompaniment: Ave Maria

¹⁰Donald J. Grout and Claude V. Palisca, A History of Western Music 4th ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1988), 673.

(Opus 12) and Begräbnisgesang (Opus 13), as well as a set of Four Songs (Opus 17) for choir, harp and horns, and two works: Geistliches Lied (Opus 30) and Psalm 13 (Opus 27) for choir and keyboard.

Brahms appears to have set aside his *a cappella* compositions in favor of choral works with orchestral accompaniment between 1865 and 1872. Three representative pieces are: Ein Deutsches Requiem (Opus 45), Alto Rhapsodie (Opus 53) and Schicksalslied (Opus 54).

After 1875, Brahms devoted himself to composing and travelling. One author states that between 1877 and 1879, when Brahms spent quiet, peaceful summers in Pörtlshach am Wörthersee, Austria, he wrote some of his best music. "...hardly at any later period did Brahms display the same powers of creation."¹¹ It was during one of these summers that he composed the first motet of Opus 74, Warum, ist das Licht gegeben?.

In his later choral works, Brahms returns once again to an *a cappella* style. The Opus 93a and Opus 104 partsongs, the Fest- und Gedenksprüche motets of Opus 109, the three motets (Ich aber bin elend, Ach, arme Welt, and Wenn wir in höchsten Nöten sein) of Opus 110, and the publication, in 1894, of earlier written canons for female voices (Opus 113), conclude his oeuvre of choral music compositions.

¹¹Geiringer, Brahms, 130.

THE MOTETS

Brahms thus composed an immense amount of a *cappella* choral pieces. Of these, five sets of motets, Opus 29, Opus 37, Opus 74, Opus 109, and Opus 110, display some of his greatest achievements in the genre and reflect a musical style that merges early Renaissance and Baroque polyphony with the daring harmonic trends of the nineteenth century.

The motet was one of the most important forms of polyphonic music between 1220 and 1750, the earliest form being a polyphonic sacred composition, comprising a *cantus firmus* voice that progressed in long notes while two or three other voices moved in a more rhythmically active fashion around it, utilizing different texts and sometimes different languages. By the late sixteenth century, it was a more homogeneous polyphonic composition that was characterized by points of imitation in each line. And, by the Baroque era, the motet had evolved into a "sacred polyphonic composition with Latin text, which may or may not have *colla voce* or independent instrumental accompaniment."¹² The German Protestant church of the late eighteenth century, which encouraged the writing of works in the earlier styles of Schütz and Bach, and the Cecilian Movement of the early 1800's were very influential in bringing back a style of music that was "purer" than the worldly church music of the times. The *a cappella* masses and motets of the Renaissance era were highly favored. It was not until the middle of the nineteenth Century that "the Protestant motet again

¹²Sadie, ed. The New Grove Dictionary, s.v. "Motet," by David Fallows.

attracted the greatest composers...."¹³ Ivor Kemp suggests

Brahms's motets are

motets in the sense that Bach used [them], namely as a suite of religious meditations whose texts are held together by their subject matter and whose music embodies a chorale.¹⁴

Walter Niemann notes that

Brahms's motets are another superb contribution to the master's high endeavour to infuse his own new and thoroughly individual vitality and feeling into the grand old vocal art of the early masters by means of the resources of modern times.¹⁵

The texts chosen for his motets are similar to those of some of his other a cappella music, particularly the later partsongs, in that they oppose joy and sorrow, despair and assurance, death and eternal life, and merciful gods and suffering mortals. Brahms's melodies reflect a sensitivity to the texts.

Polyphony derived from Renaissance models and Baroque style homophonic passages are characteristic of the textures found in the motets. Brahms discovered new possibilities of contrast in combining major and minor keys, as well as utilizing modal functions, and often employed highly chromatic harmonies.

Opus 37 is an early work (1859) for women's voices (SSAA). It contains three Latin a cappella motets which clearly reflect the late Renaissance choral style with their polyphonic texture, use of

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ivor Kemp, Johannes Brahms (London: Christopher Helm, 1989), 256.

¹⁵Walter Niemann, Brahms, trans. Catherine Alison Phillips (New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1937), 397.

canon, and rhythmic progression in long note values in all voices. As Example 1 shows, the last piece of this opus, "Regina coeli," is a setting for two soloists in inverted canon, the chorus responding with repetitive, antiphonal "alleluia" statements.

EXAMPLE 1 Regina coeli, measures 1 - 10.

Allegro

Soprano solo

Re - gi - na, re - gi - na coe - li lae - ta - re, re - gi - na, re -
Er - freu - e, er - freu - e dich, Him - mela - für - stin, er - freu - e, er -

Alto solo

Re - gi - na, re - gi - na coe - li lae - ta - re, re -
Er - freu - e, er - freu - e dich, Him - mela - für - stin, er -

Soprano I

Soprano II

Alto I

Alto II

Coro

gi - na coe - li lae - ta - re, Al - le - lu - ja, Al - le - lu - ja!
freu - e dich, Him - mela - für - stin, Al - le - lu - ja, Al - le - lu - ja,

Al - le - lu - ja, Al - le - lu - ja, Al - le - lu -

Al - le - lu - ja, Al - le - lu - ja, Al - le - lu -

Al - le - lu - ja, Al - le - lu - ja, Al - le - lu -

Al - le - lu - ja, Al - le - lu - ja, Al - le - lu -

THE MOTETS OF OPUS 29

By the 1860's, Brahms had spent some fifteen years carefully studying early musical styles and had thus become highly familiar with such techniques as canon, counterpoint and fugue. The two Opus 29 motets,¹⁷ written about this time, reflect this familiarity:

They [Opus 29 motets] are the precious fruit of long years of deep immersion in the great vocal works of Bach and practical experience of them,... They are grandiose masterpieces in difficult contrapuntal style, which revels in the most elaborate possibilities of the chorale, simultaneous double augmentation of values in the *canto fermo*, imitation and inversion of themes, augmentation, and strictly fugal concluding sections.¹⁸

Es ist das Heil uns kommen her is the first motet of Opus 29. It is divided into two main sections: an introductory chorale and a longer imitative setting that Brahms called a *fuga*, which is not a fugue in the strict use of expositions and episodes, and so on, but rather a systematically imitative treatment of the whole chorale tune. The chorale and fugue were often used by Bach and other Baroque composers and Brahms clearly reflects that influence. The text, written by the religious poet Paul Speratus, deals with the idea of salvation through faith. The music is set in E major; however, Brahms often lowered the leading tone, thereby creating a modal quality to the music.

¹⁷Opus 29 was first published in 1864 by Breitkopf und Härtel after Simrock rejected them. However, twenty-four years later, Simrock did publish them. They were first performed in Vienna on April 17, 1864.

¹⁸Niemann, Brahms, 398.

The chorale is made up of two four-measure phrases plus a cadential two-measure phrase, and is set for a four-part choir. The music of the first phrase is used for each of the first two lines of text, the rest of the text being set to the second and the cadential phrases. The chorale melody is given to the sopranos and progresses in quarter notes, while the lower three parts support it with melodies that move in eighth-notes. There are Baroque style *fermatas* at the end of each two-measure clause.

The second movement of the piece, set for five voices, comprises the *fuga*, which uses the preceding chorale melody as its subject. Statements of the themes are relatively brief and little development of the material occurs.

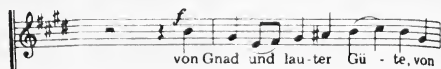
In the first section, the tenors and sopranos state the subject, and the altos and basses present the answer. The rhythm of the melody has changed somewhat from the chorale, now presenting a three-note anacrusis to the next measure, which provides emphasis on the word "Heil" in the phrase "Es ist das Heil." The baritones enter with the chorale melody in long notes at measure 20, an example of *Vorimitation* used by Bach in some of his chorale preludes.

In the second section the altos and basses have the subject and the sopranos and tenors state the answer. At measure 27, an inversion of part of the melody is presented polyphonically in conjunction with the text "*von Gnad und lauter Güten*," as shown in Example 3. The baritones enter with the chorale melody in measure 29, and the other voices develop longer musical phrases.

EXAMPLE 3 Es ist das Heil¹⁹

a) Alto line, measure 23, b) All parts, measures 27 - 29.

a)



b)

The music of the first two sections is repeated in the next two sections (with new text), thereby following the musical form of the chorale itself.

The fifth section, beginning at measure 55, uses melodic material from the beginning of the second full phrase of the chorale melody. The tenors and sopranos present the subject, which is answered by the altos and basses. Noteworthy features of this contrapuntal passage are the arpeggiation of a diminished triad and the fluctuation between a raised and lowered leading tone. This section, like the previous four, concludes with the statement of the chorale melody in the baritone part.

¹⁹Within each motet, the measure numbers continue consecutively from the beginning to the end of the motet.

Unlike the strict fugal entries of the preceding passages, in the sixth section Brahms treats the thematic material in a freely imitative style, although the sopranos and basses do present melodic material from the chorale. From measure 64 to 69, these imitative melodic fragments are present in all voices except the baritone. Once the baritone voice enters with the chorale melody, the other vocal lines present longer musical phrases.

The last section has a new tempo marking, *poco a poco piu sostenuto*. There are two- and three-note motives alternating between the voices (measures 70 - 73). When the baritones enter with the final clause of the chorale melody, the basses join them rhythmically and textually, while the upper three vocal lines broaden into longer, more expressive phrases. This section is the most chromatic of all the sections of the *fuga*, each voice part fluctuating between the major and minor modes and incorporating other chromatic alterations over a tonic pedal in the bass and baritone parts. The passage arrives at a final cadence in E major.

The second motet in Opus 29 is Schaffe in mir, Gott. The text is taken from Psalm 51:10 - 12 and describes the desire for spiritual cleansing. Brahms divided this tripartite text into four sections, and set it as two canons and two fugues, in G major.

In the first division of the motet, given as Example 4, there is a slow homophonic introduction, after which each line gains more independence. An important feature of this section is the canon between the soprano and bass. Reflecting the contrapuntal techniques of the Renaissance, the bass melody is a rhythmically

augmented version of the soprano melody. The basses present the melody once (measures 1 - 25), while the sopranos present it twice (measures 1 - 13 and 13 - 25). The middle parts are more freely derived, yet not without some influence from the melody. The tenor voice, in measures 10 to 13, imitates the soprano voice in measures 8 to 12. The baritone voice (measures 14 - 16) repeats the opening two measures of the soprano line.

EXAMPLE 4 Schaffe in mir, Gott, measures 1 - 25.

espressivo 3 5

Soprano
Schaf-fe in mir, Gott, ein rein Herz und gib, und gib mir einen

Alto I, II
espressivo
Schaf-fe in mir, Gott, schaf-fe in mir, Gott, ein rei - nes Herz, einen

Tenore
espressivo
Schaf-fe in mir, schaf-fe in mir ein rein Herz,

Basso I
espressivo
Schaf-fe in mir, Gott, ein rein Herz und gib mir, und gib

Basso II
espressivo
Schaf - fe in mir, Gott, ein rein

9 11 15 17

neuen ge - wis - sen Geist, schaff in mir, Gott, ein rein Herz

neuen ge - wis - sen Geist, schaff in mir ein rein Herz und

... und einen neuen ge - wis - sen Geist, schaff in mir ein rein Herz schaf-fe

mir einen neu - en ge - wis - sen Geist, schaf - fe in mir, Gott,

Herz und gib, und gib mir ei - nen neu -

18 20 22 24

und gib, und gib mir einen neu - en ge - wis - sen Geist.

gib, und gib mir einen neu - en ge - wis - sen Geist.

in mir, Gott, ein rein Herz und gib mir ei - nen neuen ge - wis - sen Geist.

und gib, und gib mir ei - nen neu - en ge - wis - sen Geist.

en ge - wis - sen Geist.

In measure 65, the theme appears in the bass voice, while the altos sing an inversion. Five measures later, the sopranos and tenors state the inverted subject canonically, and in measure 75, the altos and basses resume the canon. The sopranos do not sing the final six measures of this section and the lower three voices progress to a Renaissance cadence on G.

The third section, beginning in measure 81, is a canon set for a trio of men's voices (TBB) and a trio of women's voices (SSA). The men's voices open this section with the tenor and bass lines occurring in strict canon at the interval of a seventh and at a one measure interval, while the baritones move rhythmically with the tenor line, as shown in Example 6.

EXAMPLE 6 Schaffe in mir, Gott, measures 81 - 85.

The musical score for Example 6 shows three staves. The top staff is for Soprano (S), the middle for Tenor (T), and the bottom for Bass (B). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The music is marked 'p espressivo' and 'poco cresc.'. The lyrics are: 'Trö - ste mich wie - der mit dei - ner Hil - fe, und der Trö - ste mich wie - der mit dei - ner Hil - fe, und der Trö - ste mich wie - der mit dei - ner Hil - fe,'.

The women's voices enter at the conclusion of this introductory canon, (measure 90), their phrases repeating the music and text of the preceding passage. The section concludes with a third canonic passage, similar to the first (except with a different text), beginning on the last beat of measure 98. The last two measures of this passage form a bridge to the concluding fugue of the motet.

The final section, beginning in measure 110, contrasts considerably with the previous three divisions of the motet since the tempo is *Allegro*, and the theme is more joyful in character due to its leaps and eighth-note movement, all depicting the text ("*under the joyful spirit preserve me*"). The angular shape at the beginning of the subject is answered by a descending stepwise motive beginning with the word "*spirit*."

The sopranos begin this fugal setting with the altos answering on the dominant. The tenors and basses enter similarly at measure 115 and 117 respectively. The altos and basses are no longer divided. Fragments of the subject are presented, at times imitatively and canonically, in each voice to measure 125.

The tempo marking is *Animato* at measure 126, and the sopranos sing the final statement of the subject, with *stretto* entries from the altos and tenors; however, this time the sopranos and altos sustain their highest pitches of the motive before continuing their phrases. The altos and tenors sing in sixths for the setting of "*preserve me*" (measures 129 - 131), while the basses have an *ostinato*-like part. This passage culminates with a full four beats of silence, before the concluding powerful cadence to G major.

This motet reflects many of the stylistic traits that Brahms would have learned through his study of early music, traits such as canonic texture, inversion of subjects, chromatic countersubjects, and changes in meter and tempo to suit the character of the text and its expression.

THE MOTETS OF OPUS 110

Brahms's last motets, Opus 110, were written in 1889.²⁰ They are profoundly serious works, the texts being of a grave and pessimistic character, depicting human fallibility and a need for trust in God. The first and third motets are set for two choirs, reflecting the antiphonal style of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century polychoral traditions. Virginia Hancock describes the first and third motets as displaying

a freer use of dissonance and unconventional voice leading than appears in his earlier choral works. Chromaticism in the manner of Bach is found frequently in the earlier motets, but now combined with it is a kind of unpredictability, coupled with moments of extreme simplicity, which seems illogical by comparison with Bach or the younger Brahms but does resemble early Baroque practice.²¹

Hancock also states that the second motet, although a brief, four-part homophonic, strophic setting,

contains a remarkable concentration of emotional expression attained by the use of a variety of techniques, some with a long history from early music, and some from nineteenth-century practice.²²

The first motet, Ich aber bin elend, begins in the key of e-minor. The text, from Psalm 69:30 and Exodus 34:6 - 7, is about God's mercy, grace and forgiveness. Brahms did not use a metrical version of the text, therefore, there are irregular lengths of

²⁰These pieces were first published in 1890 by Simrock and had their premiere in Cologne in the same year.

²¹Virginia Hancock, Brahms's Choral Compositions and His Library of Early Music (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1983), 141.

²²Ibid, 137.

phrases in keeping with the text setting. The motet is divided into three through-composed sections: the first and third have a polyphonic texture, and the second is of antiphonal, homophonic design.

In measures 1 to 7, Brahms has given the sopranos of both choirs the same melody, while the tenors and basses sing independent lines that are melodically and harmonically quite chromatic. The altos are tacet until measure 9. In measures 9 to 16, the basses of both choirs repeat the soprano melody of measures 1 to 7, a fifth lower. The altos and sopranos carry the winding chromatic lines and the tenors are tacet.

The second section begins at measure 17. As shown in Example 7, Choir I is given a chant-like setting of the text, while choir II interjects at regular intervals with predominantly chordal settings of the words "*Herr, Herr Gott.*"

At measure 33, there is a return to a polyphonic texture. The text of this last section is more positive, "*Gott, deine Hilfe schütze mich*", which is reflected in the more diatonic quality of the passage and a shift to the key of G major.

The second motet in this set, Ach, arme Welt, is scored for four voices, has a tempo marking of *con moto* and is in 6/4 meter. It is in the key of f minor, but is very chromatic. The words are an old, anonymous chorale text. The motet is the shortest, most concise of the three works of this Opus, presented in an unadorned homophonic texture.

EXAMPLE 7 Ich aber bin elend, measures 19 - 27.

19 c.v. 21 23

barm-her-zig und gnädig und ge-dul - dig und von großer Gna - de und Treu -
 S.U.
 barm-her-zig und gnädig und ge-dul - dig und von großer Gna - de und Treu -
 S.T.
 barm-her-zig und gnädig und ge-dul - dig und von großer Gna - de und Treu -
 S.B.

Gott, Herr, Herr, Gott,
 Gott, Herr, Herr, Gott,
 Gott, Herr, Herr, Gott,
 Gott, Herr, Herr, Gott,

24 26

e, der du be-wei-sest Gna-de in tau-send Glied,
 e, der du be-weisest Gna-de in tau-send Glied,
 e, der du be-wei-sest Gna-de in tau-send Glied,
 e, der du be-weisest Gna-de in tau-send Glied,

Herr, Herr, Gott, Herr, Herr,
 Herr, Herr, Gott, Herr, Herr,
 Herr, Herr, Gott, Herr, Herr,
 Herr, Herr, Gott, Herr, Herr,

The opening soprano whole-tone scale is based on the chorale melody by Bach, "Es ist genug."²³ The shape of the soprano and

²³Ibid, 138.

alto lines are conjunct, while the tenor and bass parts are disjunct and angular with unconcealed leaps of sixths and octaves. The first two verses are set to the same music. The third verse begins and ends with this music but has three measures of new material inserted at measures 11 to 13, and ends on a major chord rather than the minor chord of the first two verses. At measures 8 and 19, there are cadential hemiolas in the soprano and alto parts. Example 8 only shows measures 7 to 9 since measures 18 to 20 are the same.

EXAMPLE 8 Ach, arme Welt, Opus 110, No. 2, ms. 7 - 9

1. und kann dich doch nicht mei - den.

2. mit Weh und gro- ßem Lei - den.

1. doch, und kann dich doch nicht mei - den.

2. gro- ßem Leiden, und gro- ßem Lei - den.

In this motet, Brahms combined such characteristics of early musical styles as an a cappella setting, a slightly polyphonically infused homophonic texture, the use of a pre-existing chorale melody and hemiolas, together with such nineteenth-century musical aspects as bold chromatic harmonies and very angular melodies.

The third motet, Wenn wir in höchsten Nöten sein, returns to the double choir style of the first motet. The text was written by

the sixteenth-century religious poet, Paul Eber. The work is filled with chromatic inflections, repetition and imitation. It is divided into four distinct sections, corresponding to the four strophes of the text, the third section repeats the musical material of the first, and the fourth is a variation of the second.

The first section, in common time, is in c minor, with some chromatic inflections. The texture of this passage alternates between homophonic and imitative polyphonic writing. The thematic material of the initial homophonic passage (measures 1 - 3) is repeated in the second homophonic passage (measures 7 - 9) and the motivic idea of the first polyphonic setting (measures 4 - 6) is reused, often in inversion, in the second polyphonic passage (measures 10 - 13).

In the second section, beginning on the last beat of measure 13, the meter changes to 3/4 time, the texture is more homophonic throughout and there is some antiphonal writing between the two choirs. The passage fluctuates between c minor and f minor; however, the words "o treuer Gott" (measures 22 - 24) are set in C major and the passage concludes with a cadence in C major.

The third section (measures 31 - 43) is a musical repetition of the first, with new text.

The fourth section (measures 44 - 73) is very much like the second, but is longer and more complex. There is more antiphonal writing between the two choirs, and the inner measures of the passage (measures 48 - 66) are dominated by a chant-like accompaniment of the thematic idea, as shown in Example 9. The

material of the opening passage of this section returns in measure 67 this time beginning with Choir II, creating an *aba* structure to this section of the motet.

EXAMPLE 9 Wenn wir in höchsten Nöten sein, measures 53 - 58.

53 55 57 58

dei - nem Wort, nach - dei - nem Wort,

sein nach deinem Wort, ge-horsam sein nach deinem Wort,

sein nach deinem Wort, ge-horsam sein nach deinem Wort,

sein nach deinem Wort, ge-horsam sein nach deinem Wort,

ge-horsam sein nach deinem Wort,

ge-horsam sein nach deinem Wort,

ge - - hor - sam sein, ge

ge-horsam sein nach deinem Wort,

These motets are very difficult to perform since Brahms places great demands on the singers in terms of vocal ability, and rhythmic and harmonic accuracy. These are not the pieces of a young, maturing composer, who is dependent upon knowledge gained from studies of early methods of choral composition. They are works of a nineteenth-century choral master, which reflect the assimilation of knowledge gleaned from his study of early music and from his work with various choirs throughout his career.

THE MOTETS OF OPUS 74

I have in mind to publish two entirely excellent, beautiful motets for choir... They are I think better than others I have written, but also more practical and effective. The one is harder, but as a compensation, there are many small sections in it, which could most suitably be sung separately in church and concert.²⁴

These were Brahms's words in a letter written on July 2, 1878, concerning his two a cappella motets, Warum ist das Licht gegeben? (1877) and O Heiland, reiss die Himmel auf (1863 - 64). They were published together by Simrock in 1878 as Opus 74. Warum was first performed on December 8, 1878 at the *Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde* in Vienna by the *Singverein*, directed by Eduard Kremser. O Heiland had its premiere on January 30, 1880 in Hamburg, sung by the *Cäcilienverein*, conducted by Julius Spengel. Brahms dedicated the Opus 74 motets to Philipp Spitta, a Bach historian and close friend of Brahms.

Warum ist das Licht gegeben? was composed during one of the summers that Brahms spent at Pörtshach, between 1877 and 1879. It is considered to be his greatest a cappella work:

Its complex multi-movement structure with thematic processes extending across movements, and the depth and originality of its expression all justify its being viewed as the greatest of Brahms's a cappella motets,...²⁵

Some of the music is derived from an unfinished canonic mass

²⁴Robert Pascall, "Brahms's *Missa Canonica* and its recomposition in his motet *Warum Op. 74 No.1*," in Brahms 2: biographical, documentary and analytical studies, ed. Michael Musgrave (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 136.

²⁵Ibid.

in C minor that Brahms composed in 1856, in which Brahms's studies of Palestrina are clearly reflected. The motet also encompasses other practices of earlier eras but nevertheless belongs entirely to the nineteenth-century. According to Michael Musgrave,

No one work better indicates the process of change in Brahms's choral language over the years than the motet "*Warum?*" Here are presented elements well familiar from the earlier motets - fugue, canon, chorale harmonisation - yet the effect is strikingly different and more personal.²⁶

Virginia Hancock describes some compositional techniques Brahms used in the first movement of Warum:

The strictly organized chromatic fugue at the start, the free counterpoint of the middle part, with its change from chromatic to diatonic expression as the text lightens temporarily, and the return at the end to the thematic material of the fugue, without its contrapuntal structure and in a different meter, form the outline of a movement which in many details utilizes practices of an earlier era, but which in its entirety belongs to the late nineteenth Century.²⁷

The first movement of Warum is in the key of d-minor, has a tempo marking of *Langsam und ausdrucksvoll*, and is in a meter of common time which changes to 3/4 at measure 55. There are three main sections in the movement: the first is from measure 4 to 24; the second begins in measure 28 and continues to measure 50; and the third is from measure 54 to 76. These three sections are clearly delineated through chordal interjections of the word "Warum."

²⁶Michael Musgrave, The Music of Brahms (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), 170.

²⁷Hancock, Brahms's Choral Compositions, 134.

These chords, shown in Example 10, present a harmonic question and answer through the progression of V/iv to iv and V to i in d-minor.

EXAMPLE 10 Warum is das Licht gegeben, measures 1 - 4.

Langsam und ausdrucksvoll

The musical score is for four voices: Soprano I, II; Alto; Tenore; and Basso I, II. It is in D minor (two flats) and common time (C). The tempo is 'Langsam und ausdrucksvoll'. The score shows measures 1 through 4. The lyrics are 'War - um?'. The music features a harmonic progression from V/iv to iv and V to i. The first measure is marked with a forte (f) dynamic, and the second measure is marked with a piano (p) dynamic. There is a triplet of eighth notes in the Soprano part in measure 2.

The two sets of chords are separated by three beats of silence, thereby heightening the effect of the question/answer created by the indicated harmonic progression.

The first section of this movement is a strictly-maintained canon. The subject material and canonic activity is based on the "Agnus Dei" theme from Brahms's canonic mass. Example 11 shows the melody line of both for comparison. The theme, in the motet, has been transposed a minor third lower, and there is some variation and expansion through the use of passing tones and repeated notes. The *alle breve* time and the predominant movement in half-notes of the "Agnus Dei" has been changed to common time with a quarter-note movement. The order of the canonic entries has been retained

a)

5 7
 War-um ist das Licht ge-ge-ben dem Mühe-li-gen, und das Le-ben den be-trüb-
 10 12
 -ten Her-zen, den be-trüb-ten Her-zen, den be-trüb-ten Her-zen,

b)

P molto espress.

A - - - gnus De - i, qui tol - lis pec - ca - ta mun - di mi - se -

9

re - re no - bis, mi - se - re - re, mi - se - re - re, A - - gnus De - i,

17

mi - se - re - re no - bis, mi - se - re - re! A - - gnus De - i,

The subject outlines a d-minor chord in its ascending melody, and ends on G-sharp, the raised fourth of d-minor, and the countersubject is very chromatic and disjunct with leaps of tritones, sixths and octaves. All the voices cadence on the second beat of measure 20. On the fourth beat of measure 20, a brief passage begins in which the soprano and bass, and the alto and

28

tenor voices are paired in a melodic and rhythmic duet which cadences on the dominant of d-minor (measures 20 - 24). Dynamically, this fugal section progresses at *forte* until the final cadence in measure 24, when it tapers to *piano*.

The "Warum" chords, first heard at the opening of the motet, appear again in measures 25 to 28, this time with a decrescendo marked over the first chord.

The second section of the movement begins in measure 29 with imitative entries of a descending melodic line in the tenor, alto and bass, and as Example 12 shows, there is a homophonic statement of the text "und kommt nicht" following this descending line.

EXAMPLE 12 Warum ist das Licht gegeben, measures 29 - 33.

The musical score for Example 12, measures 29-33, is presented in four staves. The first staff (Soprano) begins in measure 29 with a whole rest, followed by a half rest in measure 30, and then a descending melodic line starting in measure 31. The second staff (Alto) begins in measure 29 with a whole rest, followed by a half rest in measure 30, and then a descending melodic line starting in measure 31. The third staff (Tenor) begins in measure 29 with a whole rest, followed by a half rest in measure 30, and then a descending melodic line starting in measure 31. The fourth staff (Bass) begins in measure 29 with a whole rest, followed by a half rest in measure 30, and then a descending melodic line starting in measure 31. The lyrics are: "und kommt nicht, Die des To - des war - ten und kommt nicht, die Die des To - des war - ten und kommt nicht, Die des To - des war - ten und kommt nicht,". The score includes dynamic markings such as *p* and *dolce*, and a crescendo hairpin in measure 32.

Another imitative presentation of the descending, imitative line, this time in the alto, soprano and tenor voices, begins in measure 34. The second statement of "und kommt nicht" (measures 37 - 39) is more extended than the first one and involves somewhat more rhythmic independence of parts and a broader dynamic range through

a long crescendo to *forte*. The voices cadence on C. The text "*und grüben ihn*," is presented homophonically in chorale-like style, in which the outer two voices and inner two voices are melodically and rhythmically paired. The section closes with a cadence in D-major, ornamented in the alto and tenor voices.

The third "Warum" statement occurs in measures 51 to 54, again with a decrescendo on the first chord.

The meter of the concluding section changes to 3/4. The sopranos and tenors sing, in octaves, the melody of the opening fugue subject, and as Example 13 shows, it is substantially altered in character due to the meter change, a change in dynamics to *pianissimo*, and the absence of a fugal texture.

EXAMPLE 13 Warum ist das Licht gegeben, measures 54 - 58.

55 57

pp

Und dem Man-ne, deß Weg ver-bor-gen ist,

pp

Und dem Man-ne, deß Weg ver-bor-gen ist,

Four measures later, the altos and basses enter, and the upper three voices present an ascending chromatic line, which can be perceived as an inversion of the countersubject first heard in the soprano part beginning in measure 7. In measures 64 to 68 the

altos and basses present the altered fugue subject in octaves. The soprano and bass voices have the chromatically ascending inversion of the countersubject, in canon at the twelfth, from measures 69 to 76. In direct contrast to the first section of this movement, the lines progress at the level of *piano* until the final cadence when Brahms writes a long crescendo that leads to the final *forte* statement of the "Warum" chords.

Because of the meter change, the progression of the "Warum" chords is now eight measures long instead of three. It begins *forte* and is followed by a decrescendo that effectively extends to the end of the movement. A complete measure of rest separates the two statements of "Warum."

The second movement is in F major, has a meter of 6/4, a tempo marking of *Wenig bewegter*, and is set for a six voices (SSATBB). The music and text of measures 85 to 92 is repeated in measures 93 to 103 with some alteration.

The music is an almost exact repetition of the Benedictus movement of Brahms's canonic mass, at the original pitch and with the original meter. The first twelve measures of the motet movement have a few extra passing tones; however, the end of the movement is quite different. The first part of this movement is a canon for four voices only (SSAT). The melodic line is an expansive ascending/descending arch spanning a ninth. As the last voice of the introductory canon cadences, the first voice of the next canonic passage begins. In this second passage, the two bass voices join the canon with shortened versions of the melody, above

which the other parts move in freer counterpoint, with some imitation among the voices. As provided in Example 14, from measure 100 to the end of the passage, there are imitative entries of an ascending line in the upper voices while the basses sustain a pedal on F.

EXAMPLE 14 Warum ist das Licht gegeben, measures 100 - 103.

The musical score for six voices (SSATBB) for measures 100-103 of "Warum ist das Licht gegeben" is shown. The score consists of six staves, each with a vocal line and German lyrics. Measures 100 and 102 are marked. The music features imitative entries in the upper voices and a sustained pedal point on F in the basses. The lyrics are: "he - ben zu Gott, zu Gott im Him - mel. Hän - den auf - he - ben zu Gott, zu Gott im Him - mel, Gott im Him - mel. samt den Hän - den auf - he - ben zu Gott im Him - mel. Hän - den auf - he - ben zu Gott im Him - mel. samt den Hän - den auf - he - ben zu Gott im Him - mel. samt den Hän - den auf - he - ben zu Gott im Him - mel." The tempo marking "rit." is present above measures 102 and 103.

The third movement, scored for six voices (SSATBB) is divided into two sections. The first one is predominantly in the G dorian mode, with brief ventures into the keys of C and F major, has a meter of 4/4, and a marking of *Langsam und sanft*. The music of the soprano line is derived from the "Dona nobis pacem" section of the canonic mass, with alterations such as a different time signature and different rhythms. Example 15 presents the melody lines of the opening of this movement and the "Dona nobis pacem" for comparison. The chorale melody progresses in quarter- and half-notes above the more rhythmically active, melodically independent lower five

a)

dolce espressivo

106

Sie - he, wir prei - sen se - lig, die er -

108 110 112

dul - det ha - ben, wir prei - sen se - lig, se -

113 115 117

lig, die er - dul - det ha - ben.

b)

Do - na no - bis pa - cem, do - na no - bis pa - - - -

54

cem, do - na no - bis pa - - - cem, do - na

60

no - bis pa - - cem, do - na no - bis pa - - - - cem.

The second section of this movement, beginning in measure 118, is in the key of F major and has a meter signature of 6/4. It is a brief section that begins with an antiphonal double trio, (S²TB¹) and (S¹AB²). After two measures, the parts gain more independence, and create a seven-measure bridge to the repetition of the canonic material from the second movement (measures 125 - 135). An exact repetition of the second half of the second movement ensues, with

minor alterations to accommodate different text and with minor changes in voicing in the last three measures.

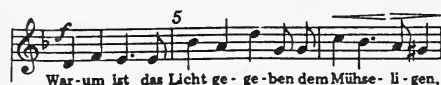
The final movement is a four-part chorale harmonization in the style of Bach, in the key of d-minor, the key in which the motet opens and around which the motet gravitates. The melody is from Martin Luther's hymn of the same name, Mit Fried und Freud, but is set with Brahms's own daring and bold chromatic harmonies. The first few measures of the soprano melody is very similar to the opening canonic melody of the motet, outlining the initial arpeggiated ascent in d-minor, followed by a descending step-wise line. Example 16 provides the beginning of both melodies.

EXAMPLE 16 a) Warum ist das Licht gegeben, soprano line, measures 136 - 137, b) soprano line, ms. 4 - 6.

a)



b)



The phrases are of irregular lengths with *fermatas* at the end of each phrase (characteristics found in Bach's chorale settings). In the last two measures, the tempo slows to *Adagio*, to emphasize the text and provide a conclusive end to both the chorale and the motet.

A closer look at the text will give a clearer understanding of the nuances in the musical setting. The words of the whole motet

focus upon the travails and purpose of life and the mercy of God and the calm release of death. It is believed that Brahms compiled the texts on his own, and that when he sent a copy of the score to Otto Dessooff, Brahms indicated that his choice of texts "showed off his knowledge of the Bible and perhaps preached better than his words could."²⁹

The text of the first movement is based on Job 3:20 - 23, a biblical passage in which Job is in his deepest despair and wants only death. Brahms aptly portrays the picture of human despair through his poignant outbursts of "Warum" and through his use of chromaticism and angular melodies. Edwin Evans suggests that "the meaning of the long sentence is rendered more clear and the effect correspondingly improved" with the insertion of the "Warum" chords.³⁰ At the end of the movement, Job's question has not been answered, and so the musical/textual question first heard in the introductory four measures of the motet is repeated.

The second movement is based on another Old Testament writer, Jeremiah. The words are an exhortation to turn unconditionally to God, to lift both hands and heart to God. Brahms set this text appropriately with melodic lines that ascend heavenward, as shown in Example 17. J.A. Fuller-Maitland states that this movement is "a beautiful phrase suggesting the idea of the uplifted heart of

²⁹Hancock, Brahms's Choral Compositions, 134.

³⁰Edwin Evans, Historical, Descriptive and Analytical Account of the Entire Works of Johannes Brahms (New York: Burt Franklin, 1912), 358.

EXAMPLE 17 Warum ist das Licht gegeben, measures 85 - 93.

Wenig bewegt
poco *f* et espressivo

85 87

Soprano I
Soprano II
Alto
Tenore
Basso I
Basso II

Las - set uns un - ser Herz samt den Hän-den auf - he - ben, auf -
Las - set uns un - ser Herz samt den Hän-den auf - he -
Las - set uns un - ser Herz samt den
Las - set uns un - ser Herz
Las - set uns un - ser Herz

89 91

he - ben zu Gott, zu Gott im Him - mel, las - set uns
ben, auf - he - ben zu Gott, zu Gott im Him - mel, las - set
Hän - den auf - he - ben, auf - he - ben zu Gott, zu Gott im Him - mel,
samt den Hän - den auf - he - ben, auf - he - ben zu Gott, zu Gott im Him - mel,

the worshipper."³¹ The repetition of the entire text within a slightly different musical context, serves to reinforce this counsel.

The text of the third movement of the motet is from James 5:11, and is an offering of consolation for those who suffer, an extolling of Job's patience and a reminder that God's purposes are

³¹J.A. Fuller-Maitland, Brahms (New York: Kennikat Press, 1911), 213.

merciful. The setting of the first line of text extends for almost half of the movement, the sopranos presenting it twice, while the lower five parts have fragmented text repetition. The setting of the second line of text, the words of which are a reminder of Job's patience, is set to new music in a contrasting triple meter. The peaceful mood of the previous section is generally maintained, and eventually returns to the music of the second movement. The music used to reflect the lifting of hands and heart to heaven, "*Lasset uns*" of the second movement, (measures 85 - 103), is now reused for the words "*denn der Herr ist barmherzig und ein Erbarmer*" (That the Lord is compassionate and a merciful God) (measures 125 - 135).

The text of the chorale is based on Martin Luther's metrical version of the *Nunc Dimittis*, from Luke 2:29 - 32, in which Simeon, after seeing the infant Jesus, was able to be at peace about his own death. Brahms chose to set the metrical version of the text rather than the exact Biblical version in order to suit his musical purposes of ending this motet with a Lutheran style chorale.

Thus, ...while the establishment of a verbal text is logically and ontologically prior to the composition of the music, musical concerns come vigorously into play in the establishment of the text, and the genesis of the musical part of the work is already in some sense under way.³²

This movement is looked upon as the textual and musical summation of the previous movements: "Death, which Job had sought in despair as release and end to affliction, has now become Simeon's accepted

³²Pascall, "Brahms's *Missa Canonica*," 123.

joyous summation,"³³ and the chromatic, angular themes of the first movement are calmed by the more step-wise melodies and the more diatonic harmonies of the chorale.

It is evident in this motet that Brahms was still being influenced by earlier musical styles of the Renaissance and Baroque, but on a different level. The canonic mass, which is a reflection of Palestrina's style, became the source of much of Warum, thus reflecting the traditions of Palestrina. Yet this motet is clearly a nineteenth-century work, exhibiting the expressiveness of the Romantic era through its broader harmonic language, more disjunct melodies, changes in rhythmic movement and meter signatures, and the variety of textural changes.

Its [Warum's] growth out of the music of the *Missa Canonica* offers yet another fascinating glimpse into Brahms's compositional processes, and the evolution of the old into the new is itself original, highly subtle and deeply, powerfully expressive.³⁴

The second motet of Opus 74, O Heiland, reiss die Himmel auf, was composed earlier in Brahms's life, between 1862 and 1865, not long after the Opus 29 motets were written. As mentioned in the discussion of Opus 29, Brahms had been quite involved in studying earlier musical styles and in the 1860's was copying scores of Palestrina and Bach. One can detect in this motet the influence of Bach's cantatas, particularly Cantata 4 (*Christ lag in Todesbanden*), in the series of choral variations in the old style,

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid, 136.

in which a continuous *cantus firmus* is used. This motet is tonally more exploratory and eventful than the Opus 29 motets:

its five verses are not only a compendium of almost all the early music techniques Brahms had used in his choral writing up to this time, but they exhibit the use of additional resources that he had not yet drawn upon in choral music.³⁵

Brahms discovered the tune and text of the chorale in Karl Severin Meister's Das katholische deutsche Kirchenlied in seinen Singweisen, of 1862, which had many polyphonic settings in an appendix, and in David Gregor Corner's Gross' Catolisch Gesangbuch, of 1631, from which he copied many sacred folk songs.³⁶

The first verse is in f minor, but contains modal inflections through the use of the lowered leading tone, Eb; it is set in 3/2 meter, and rhythmically progresses in steady half- and whole-note values, all features which reflect characteristics of Renaissance musical style. It is a straightforward polyphonic setting, that opens with imitative entries in all voices,³⁷ shown in Example 18. Only the sopranos present the *cantus firmus* in its entirety and without elaboration. The final nine measures of the verse are more homophonic in texture and involve more chromatic alterations. The voices cadence on F, the tenors providing the fifth above. The

³⁵Hancock, Brahms's Choral Compositions, 119.

³⁶Virginia Hancock, "The growth of Brahms's interest in early choral music, and its effect on his own choral compositions," in Brahms: biographical, documentary and analytical studies, ed. Robert Pascall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 34.

³⁷Often in Renaissance music, the tenor voice was the leading or most important voice, a feature which is reflected in this motet by the tenors starting three out of the five verses.

EXAMPLE 18 O Heiland, reiss die Himmel auf, measures 1 - 6.

Tempo giusto

Soprano
Alto
Tenor
Basso

O Hei - land, reiß die Him - mel auf, 3
O Hei - land, reiß die Him - mel auf, her 5
O Hei - land, reiß die Him - mel auf, her - ab, her -
O Hei - land, reiß die Him - mel auf, her - ab, her -

absence of the third in this final cadence is another reflection of the influence of Renaissance traditions in this motet.

In the second verse, also in *f* minor, with modal inflections, a meter of 3/2 time and a polyphonic texture, Brahms again places the *cantus firmus* in the soprano voice, and sets it in half- and whole-notes. The other voices move in notes of smaller values (quarter and half notes), their initial imitative entries being a rhythmic diminution of the *cantus firmus*, as presented in Example 19.

EXAMPLE 19 O Heiland, reiss die Himmel auf, measures 19 - 24.

19 21

O Gott, ein' Tau vom Him - mel gieß,
O Gott, ein' Tau vom Him-mel gieß, o Gott, ein' Tau vom Him - mel gieß,
O Gott, ein' Tau vom Him-mel gieß, im Tau her - ab,
O Gott, ein' Tau vom Him-mel gieß, o Gott, ein' Tau vom Him-mel gieß, o Gott, ein' Tau vom Him -

The voices become more independent as the verse progresses. The final cadence is on F, this time with the altos providing the fifth above.

The tenors present the *cantus firmus* in the third verse. The tonality and meter of the previous two sections is maintained. The *cantus firmus* statement begins unornamented in half- and whole-notes, against which staccato chords occur in the other voices. However, by the third measure (measure 39), melodic ornamentation, in a triplet rhythm, appears in the *cantus firmus* voice, in the form of cadential hemiolas at the end of each line of text, and is imitated in the other voices, as shown in Example 20.

EXAMPLE 20 O Heiland, reiss die Himmel auf, measures 37 - 41.

37 *f* *O Erd, schlag aus, o Erd, schlag aus, schlag*

39 *O Erd, schlag aus, o Erd, schlag aus, schlag aus, schlag*

40 *aus, schlag aus, o Erd,*

41 *aus, schlag aus, o Erd,*

42 *o Erd, schlag aus, o Erd,*

This ornamental extension involves some word repetition and melismatic treatment of the text. Towards the end of this section, the music becomes somewhat more dramatic, as can be seen in Example 21, due to a higher tessitura in the soprano part, greater frequency of triplets in the alto part, and a melodic ascent in all parts to the final cadence.

EXAMPLE 21 O Heiland, reiss die Himmel auf, measures 51 - 56.

51 bring, o Hei-land, aus der Er-den spring, aus der

o Hei-land, aus der Er-den spring, aus der

o Hei-land, aus der

bring, o Hei-land, o Hei-land, aus der

53 ritardando

Er-den, aus der Er-den spring!

Er-den spring, aus der Er-den, aus der Er-den spring!

Er-den spring!

Er-den, aus der Er-den spring!

The voices cadence on an f-minor chord which this time, includes the third of the triad.

The fourth verse is in the key of c minor, with some modal inflections, and is set in a slow 4/2 meter. The basses have a slightly embellished *cantus firmus*, that contains many passing tones and cadential harmonic progressions, and which moves

predominantly in half and whole notes. The tenor voice starts the movement with an ascending line, that the sopranos present in inversion one measure later, shown in Example 22.

EXAMPLE 22 O Heiland, reiss die Himmel auf, measures 57 - 63.

Adagio

57 *mp espressivo* 59 *f*

Hier lei - den wir die größ - te, größ - te Not, hier

mp espressivo Hier lei - den wir die größ - te Not, hier lei - den...

mp espressivo Hier lei - den wir die größ - te, größ - te Not, hier lei - den wir, hier lei - den...

mp espressivo Hier lei - den wir die größ - te

61 *p* 63 *p*

lei - den wir die größ - te, größ - te Not, vor Au - gen

lei - den wir die größ - te Not, vor Au - gen

wir die größ - te, größ - te Not, vor Au - gen

Not, vor Au - gen steht der

There is much more imitative counterpoint in this verse than in the previous three. The effective use of the sighing figure, as in the soprano, alto, and tenor voices in measures 57, 58, 60 - 62, together with Brahms's chromatic writing, combine to aptly portray the idea of sorrow ("leiden") expressed in the text. Even selected phrases of the *cantus firmus* contain chromatic passing tones. The last phrase of this verse (measures 69 - 73), is extremely chromatic for a motet based on Baroque traditions; however, it cadences in the key of C major, which serves a dominant function to

the next and final verse.

The setting of the concluding verse returns to the key of f minor, but employs a new meter signature of common time and a tempo marking of *Allegro*. The *cantus firmus* is treated with substantial rhythmic and melodic ornamentation and is used imitatively in all voices. As shown in Example 23, the soprano and bass parts present a strict mirror canon, which continues throughout the verse.

EXAMPLE 23 O Heiland, reiss die Himmel auf, measures 76 - 81.

The image shows a musical score for four voices (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) in F minor, common time. Measures 76, 78, and 80 are marked. The Soprano and Bass parts form a strict mirror canon. The lyrics are: 'Da wol - len wir all - dan - ken dir, dan - ken dir, all - dan - ken, all dan - ken dir, un - dan - ken dir, all - dan - ken dir, un - serm Er - lö - Da wol - len wir all - dan - ken dir,'.

In this section, there is a greater rhythmic homogeneity, all voices progressing in predominantly quarter notes and some half notes. The Amen section is highly florid and quite chromatic; the predominant rhythmic movement being in eighth notes. The soprano and bass and the tenor and alto voices are paired and present inverted canons, all utilizing the same melodic material. In the last two measures, Brahms returns to the original 3/2 time signature, and the motet concludes with a full cadence in F major.

The text of O Heiland is an anonymous rhymed German translation of the Latin hymn "Rorate coeli desuper," a text in

which there is a desire for the barriers between heaven and earth to be removed.

The first two verses have very straightforward settings of the text. The first verse, opening with imitative, ascending lines, may depict the corporate call to heaven ("*O Heiland*"). In the second verse, the smooth flow of the parts, with a narrow tessitura and a melody devoid of any awkward leaps, may portray the comfort of the heavenly dews falling to earth.

In verse three, the text speaks of the earth blooming and flowering ("*O Erd, schlag aus*"), the mountains and the valleys being green ("*dass Berg und Tal grün alles Wird*") and the Savior "springing" from the earth ("*O Heiland, aus der Erde spring*"). Musically, the first of these three images is portrayed by the "flowering" triplet ornamentations first heard in the tenor part (measures 39 & 40). The mountains and valleys and Christ's "springing" from the earth are depicted by arpeggiated figures and octave leaps, used in imitation in all the voice parts but the tenor.³⁸

One word used to describe the expressiveness of the text setting in the fourth verse is "chromaticism." In the second line of text ("*vor Augen steht der bittre Tod*"), there is sharp dissonance on the word "*bittre*" (measure 64); the harmonies of "*mit starker Hand*" (measures 67 -68), however, are diatonic. The setting of "*vom Elend zu dem Vaterland*" is highly chromatic, however, the passage eventually resolves to a major cadence on C,

³⁸See Example 21 on page 42.

for the concluding words "*zu dem Vaterland.*"

Brahms set the fifth verse as a very straightforward expression of praise, which is a startling contrast to the previous verse. The canonic structure could be viewed as representing the eternal stability of God being our guide with a strong hand.

Scholars differ on their judgement of this motet. Some say it is nothing more than pure dependence on the techniques of Bach, with no originality in the structure:

Obviously this is a work in which Brahms all but effaced his own personality in his reliance on the methods of the earlier masters."³⁹

Others believe that, although the motet was written fairly early, it has surpassed the dependency stage and begins to show Brahms' creativity:

one can see that in spite of the strophic structure, where only the chorale tune apparently serves to bind disparate sections together, and with a variety of techniques derived partly from early music and partly from his own creative intelligence, Brahms here constructed one of his most imaginative choral works, the first of the motets in which this fusion of old and new ideas is truly successfully accomplished.⁴⁰

In spite of various opinions, the Opus 74 motets have stood the test of time and remain in the repertoire of many choirs. Brahms thought that both were very fine works, as indicated at the beginning of the discussion of the Opus 74 motets.⁴¹

³⁹Geiringer, Brahms, 301.

⁴⁰Hancock, Brahms's Choral Compositions, 121 - 122.

⁴¹See footnote 24.

CONCLUSION

There is no disputing that Brahms was a master choral composer. His ability to combine features of early musical traditions within the style of nineteenth century compositions is proven by the masterpieces he wrote. The motets of Opus 29, Opus 110 and Opus 74 are clear examples of this. Opus 29 reflects Brahms' deep immersion in and concentrated study of the works of Bach. The more mature Opus 110 motets, reflect the style of Bach to some degree but are more thoroughly imbued with the musical characteristics of a late nineteenth-century composer. The motets of Opus 74 represent a more balanced blend, showing a knowledge of earlier techniques that are integrated within Brahms's own personal style:

Brahms, through his exploration and performance of early music, had thoroughly learned and absorbed the striking characteristics of that music. So no matter how much of the influence of Bach, Schütz, Gabrieli, and other early composers can be detected in Brahms's music, Brahms still sounds like Brahms.⁴²

⁴²Michael T. Roeder, "The Choral Music of Brahms: Historical Models." CAUSM [Canadian Association of University Schools of Music] Journal 5/2 (Autumn 1975): 35.

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APPENDIX 1

WORK	DATE COMPOSED	DATE PUBLISHED
Zwei Motetten, Opus 29	1860	1864
1. Es ist das Heil uns kommen her		
2. Schaffe in mir, Gott		
Drei geistliche Chöre, Opus 37		1866
1. O bone Jesu	1859	
2. Adoramus te, Christe	1859	
3. Regina coeli laetare	1863	
Zwei Motetten, Opus 74		1879
1. Warum ist das Licht gegeben?	1877	
2. O Heiland, reiss die Himmel auf	1863 - 64	
Fest- und Gedenksprüche, Opus 109	1886-88	1890
1. Unsere Väter hofften auf dich		
2. Wenn ein starker Gewappneter		
3. Wo ist ein so herrlich Volk		
Drei Motetten, Opus 110	1889	1890
1. Ich aber bin elend		
2. Ach, arme Welt		
3. Wenn wir in höchsten Nöten sein		

TRANSLATIONS

Zwei Motetten, Opus 29

Es ist das Heil uns kommen her

Es ist das Heil uns kommen her
Von Gnad und lauter Güten:
Die Werke helfen nimmermehr,

Sie mögen nicht behüten!
Der Glaub sieht Jesum Christum an:
Der hat g'nug für uns all getan,
Er ist der Mittler worden.
(Paul Speratus, 1484 - 1551)

Schaffe in mir, Gott

Schaffe in mir, Gott, ein rein Herz,
und gib mir einen neuen gewissen Geist.
Verwirf mich nicht von deinem Angesicht,
und nimm deinen heiligen Geist nicht von
mir.
Tröste mich wieder mit deiner Hilfe,
und der freudige Geist erhalte mich.
(Psalm 51:10 - 12)

A Savior is come to us
Full of grace and goodness;
Good works can never help us
more,
Nor can they protect us.
Faith looks upon Jesus Christ
He has done enough for us,
He has interceded for us.

Create in me a clean heart, O
God,
and renew a right spirit in
me.
Cast me not away from thy
presence,
and take not thy holy spirit
from me.
Comfort me again with thy
help,
and receive me with thy joyful
spirit.

Zwei Motetten, Opus 74

Warum ist das Licht gegeben?

Warum ist das Licht gegeben dem Mühseligen
und das Leben den betrübten Herzen,
die des Todes warten und kommt nicht,
und grüben ihn wohl
aus dem Verborgenen,

die sich fast freuen und sind frölich,
dass sie das Grab bekommen,
und dem Manne, dess Weg verborgen ist,
und Gott vor ihm denselben bedecket?
(Job 3:20 - 23)

Wherefore is the light given
to him that is in
misery,
and life unto the bitter in
soul
which long for death, but it
cometh not,
and dig for it more
than for hid treasures;

which rejoice exceedingly, and
are glad,
when they can find the grave?
and to a man whose way is hid,
and whom God hath hedged in?

Lasset uns unser Herz
samt den Händen aufheben
zu Gott im Himmel.
(Lamentations 3:41)

Siehe, wir preisen selig,
die erduldet haben.
Die Geduld Hiob habt ihr gehört,

und das Ende des Herrn
habt ihr gesehen;
denn der Herr ist barmherzig,

und ein Erbarmner.
(James 5:11)

Mit Fried und Freud ich fahr dahin
in Gottes Willen,
getrost ist mir mein Herz und Sinn,

sanft und stille.
Wie Gott mir verheissen hat,
der Tod ist mir Schlaf worden.
(Martin Luther)

O Heiland, reiss die Himmel auf

O Heiland, reiss die Himmel auf,

Herab, herauf vom Himmel lauf,
Reiss ab vom Himmel Tor und Tür,

Reiss ab was Schloss und Riegel für.

O Gott ein Tau vom Himmel giess,

Im Tau herab o Heiland fliess,
Ihr Wolken brecht und regnet aus

Den König über Jakobs Haus.

O Erd schlag aus, schlag aus O Erd,
Dass Berg und Tal grün alles werd,

O Erd herfür dies Blümlein bring,

O Heiland aus der Erden spring.

Hie leiden wir die grösste Not,

Vor Augen steht der bittre Tod,

Ach komm, führ uns mit starker Hand

Von Elend zu dem Vaterland.

Da wollen wir all danken dir,

Unserm Erlöser für und für,

Let us lift up our heart
with our hands
to God in heaven.

Behold, we count them happy
which endure.
Ye have heard of the patience
of Job,
and have seen
the end of the Lord;
that the Lord is
compassionate,
and merciful.

In peace and joy I will depart
in God's will;
my heart and mind are
comforted
sweet and mild.
As God has promised me,
Death has become a slumber to
me.

O Savior, open wide the
heavens,
come down from Heaven,
Tear from heaven gate and
door,
Tear off the locks and bolts.

O God, pour down a dew from
heaven,
Flow down in dew, o Savior;
Break, ye clouds, and rain
down
The King over Jacob's house.

Break open, earth, break open,
That mountain and vale grow
green;
O earth, bring forth this
blossom;
O Savior, spring forth from
the earth.

Here we suffer greatest
woe,
Bitter death is before our
eyes;
Ah, come, lead us with a
strong hand
From woe into the Father's
land.

There shall we all give thanks
to you,
Our Redeemer, time and again,

Da wollen wir all loben dich,
Je allzeit immer und ewiglich.
Amen.
(Unknown poet)

There we shall all give praise
to you,
Now, always and for evermore.
Amen.

Drei Motetten, Opus 110

Ich aber bin elend

Ich aber bin elend, und mir ist Wehe;
(Psalm 69:29)

But I am poor and sorrowful.

Herr, Herr Gott, barmherzig und gnädig,
und geduldig,
und von grosser Gnade und Treue,
der du beweiset Gnade
in tausend Glied
und vergibst Missetat,
Übertretung und Sünde,
und vor welchem
niemand unschuldig ist;
(Exodus 34:6,7)

The Lord, the Lord God,
merciful and gracious
and patient,
and abundant in goodness and
truth,
keeping mercy
for thousands,
forgiving iniquity,
transgression and sin,
and that will by no means
clear the guilty;

Herr, Herr Gott, deine Hilfe schütze mich!
(Psalm 69:30)

Lord, Lord God, thy help
protects me.

Ach, arme Welt

Ach, arme Welt, du trügest mich
Ja, das bekenn ich eigentlich
und kann dich doch nicht meiden.

Ah, poor world, you deceive me
Yes, at last I admit it,
And yet I cannot avoid you.

Du falsche Welt, du bist nicht wahr,
Dein Schein vergeht, das weiss ich zwar,
Mit Weh und grossem Leiden.

O false world, you are not
true,
Your brightness passes away, I
know it well
To my woe and great sorrow.

Dein Ehr, dein Gut, du arme Welt,
Im Tod, in rechten Nöten fehlt,
Dein Schatz ist eitel falsches Geld,
Dess hilf mir, Herr, zum Frieden!
(Unknown poet)

Your honours, your estate,
poor world
Grow desolate in death,
Your treasure is vain fool's
gold,
From which preserve me, Lord,
in peace.

Wenn wir in höchsten Nöten sein

Wenn wir in höchsten Nöten sein
Und wissen nicht, wo aus noch ein,
Und finden weder Hilf und Rat
Ob wir gleich sorgen früh und spat:
So ist das unser Trost allein,

When we in direst distress
Know neither in nor out,
And find neither help nor
counsel
Seeking them early and late:
Then our only comfort is

Dass wir zusammen ingemein
Dich rufen an, o treuer Gott,
Um Rettung aus der Angst und Not.

Sieh nicht an unser Sünden gross
Sprich uns derselbn aus Gnaden los,
Steh uns in unserm Elend bei,
Mach uns von aller Trübsal frei;

Auf dass von Herzen können wir
Nochmals mit Freuden danken dir,
Gehorsam sein nach deinem Wort,
Dich allzeit preisen hier und dort.

(Paul Eber c. 1550)

That all together with one
voice
We may call upon you, o
constant God,
For deliverance from fear and
distress.

Look not upon our great sins,
Deliver us from them in mercy,
Stand by us in our woe,
Free us from all sorrow;

That from the depths of our
hearts we may
Once more joyfully give you
thanks,
Be obedient to your Word,
And give you praise here and
there.

JOHANNES BRAHMS:
ES IST DAS HEIL
OPUS 29, NUMBER 1

(CHORALE)

A

overall form

measures

subdivisions

key

text

tempo

meter

1 _____ 4 5 _____ 10

(2 + 2) (2 + 2 + 2)

E+

Es ist das Heil uns kommen her ...

4/4

57

(FUGA a 5)

B

overall form

measures

subdivisions

key

text

tempo

meter

11 _____ 22 23 _____ 32 33 _____ 44 45 _____ 54 55 _____ 63 64 _____ 69 70 _____ 79

(3+5+4) (4+3+3) (3+5+4) (4+3+3) (4+3+2) (2+2+2) (4 + 6)

E+
(same as chorale)
Allegro

Alle breve

poco a poco
piu sostenuto
(m. 70)

SCHAFKE IN MIR, GOTT
OPUS 29, NUMBER 2

(CANON)

A

overall form

measures

subdivisions

key
text
tempo
meter

a _____ b _____
1 _____ 12 13 _____ 25
(5 + 7) (5 + 8)

G+
Schaffe in mir, Gott, ein rein Herz ...
Andante moderato
Alle breve

5
88

(FUGUE)

B

overall form

measures

subdivisions

key
text
tempo
meter

c _____ d _____ e _____ f _____ g _____ h _____
26 _____ 40 41 _____ 48 49 _____ 54 55 _____ 65 _____ 74 75 _____ 80
(3+5+3+4) (3 + 5) (2+4) (6) (5 + 5) (6)

e-
Verwirf mich nicht ...
Andante espressivo
4/4

(CANON)

C

overall form

i i' j
81 89 90 98 99 110

measures

subdivisions

(8 + 3)

(4 + 5)

key

text

tempo

meter

G+
Tröste mich wieder mit deiner Hilfe ...
Andante
6/4

5
6

(FUGUE)

D

overall form

k l m n
110 118 119 125 126 133 134 137

measures

subdivisions

(4 + 4)

(8)

(4)

key

text

tempo

meter

G+
und der freudige Geist erhalte mich ...
Allegro
6/4

Animato (m. 126)

WARUM IST DAS LICHT GEGEBEN
OPUS 74, NUMBER 1

(MOVEMENT 1)

W*	A	W	B	W	C	W
1	4	4	24 25 28 29	50 51 54 55	76 77	84
(2+2)	(3+4+3+4+3+4)	(2+2)	(3+2+3+3+3+4+4)	(2+2)	(4+6+4+8)	(3+1+4)

d-
 Warum ist das Licht gegeben dem Mühseligen ...
 Langsam und ausdrucksvoll
 4/4

3/4 (m.55)

*W = Warum chords

(MOVEMENT 2)

D	a	a'
85	93	103
(5 + 4)	(4 + 7)	

F+
 Lasset uns unser Herz ...
 Wenig bewegter
 6/4

overall form

measures

subdivisions

key
 text
 tempo
 meter

overall form

measures

subdivisions

key
 text
 tempo
 meter

(MOVEMENT 3)

E	F	D
104	117 118	127
	125	135
(3+3+4+4)	(4+3+3)	(4 + 7)

C+
 Siehe, wir preisen selig ...
 Langsam und sanft
 4/4 6/4 (m.118)

overall form

measures

subdivisions

key
 text
 tempo
 meter

(MOVEMENT 4)

G
136
147
(2 + 2 + 4 + 2 + 2)

d-
 Mit Fried und Freud ich fahr dahin ...
 4/4

overall form

measures

subdivisions

key
 text
 tempo
 meter

O HEILAND, REISS DIE HIMMEL AUF
OPUS 74, NUMBER 2

(VERSE 1)

A

overall form

measures

subdivisions

key

text

tempo

meter

1 _____ 6 _____ 10 _____ 14 _____ 18 _____
(5) (4) (5) (5)

f-

O Heiland, reiss die Himmel auf ...

tempo guisto

3/2

62

(VERSE 2)

B

overall form

measures

subdivisions

key

text

tempo

meter

19 _____ 24 _____ 29 _____ 32 33 _____ 36 _____
(3+3) (4) (4) (4)

f-

O Gott, ein' Tau vom Himmel giess ...

3/2

(VERSE 3)

C

overall form

measures

subdivisions

key

text

tempo

meter

37 40 41 45 46 51 56

(2 + 2) (3 + 2) (5) (6)

f-

O Erd, schlag aus ...

3/2

(VERSE 4)

D

overall form

measures

subdivisions

key

text

tempo

meter

57 63 65 69 72
62 65

(6) (4) (5)

C-
Hie leiden wir die grösste Not ...
Adagio
Alle breve

(VERSE 5)

overall form

measures

subdivisions

key

text

tempo

meter

E				F	
73	80	85	90	97	108
(3+4)	(6)	(5)	(8)	(3+4+2.5+1.5)	

f-
 Da wollen wir all danken dir ...
 Allegro
 4/4

F+

3/2 (m.107)

ICH ABER BIN ELEND
OPUS 110, NUMBER 1

	A	B	C
overall form			
measures	1 7 16 17	35 34	52
subdivisions	(7) (2+3+5)	(1+1+2+1+2+1+2+1+2+3) choir I and II in alternation	(8)

key G+
text Ich aber bin elend ...
tempo Andante con moto ed espressivo
meter 4/4

ACH, ARME WELT
OPUS 110, NUMBER 2

A		A'	
overall form			
measures	1 4 5 9 10 15 16 20		
subdivisions	(2+2) (2+3) (2+2+2) (2+3)		
key	f-		
text	Ach, arme Welt ...		
tempo	con moto		
meter	6/4		

WENN WIR IN HÖCHSTEN NÖTEN SEIN
OPUS 110, NUMBER 3

	A	B	A'	B'
overall form				
measures	1	13 14	30 31	43 44
subdivisions	(3+3+3+4)	(2+2+4+3+6)	(3+3+3+4)	(4+14+5+7) (2+2+2+2+2+2+2)
key	C-/C+			
text	Wenn wir in höchsten Nöten sien ...			
tempo	Andante			
meter	4/4	3/4 (m.14)	4/4 (m.31)	3/4 (m.44)

